
First Meeting with A Transsexual

J. B. writes:

> Having spent some time browsing the various posts in this group, I feel I'm better prepared to meet my [transsexual](#) cousin for the first time. However, I would be grateful for any advice anyone can give me. My cousin was originally male and is around 45 years old. I know he is currently undergoing hormone therapy but I don't think he has had the surgery yet. I last saw him about three years ago and he gave no clue as to his desire to be female. His dad (my uncle) called me about 2 weeks ago with the news and I have to say I was a bit shocked. I've written to my cousin and he has replied with an upbeat newsy type letter. He has asked that I call him to arrange a time and place to meet up. I haven't called yet and am rather nervous of doing so, yet determined nonetheless. I'm saddened that we haven't kept in touch over the years (I'm male aged 34) and don't want him to think I'm only getting in touch out of some weird curiosity.

First, your feelings are fairly typical for someone facing this issue for the first time. You can take some comfort in the probability that your cousin has encountered this before, and expects it.

Also, it is typical for many of us that no one else has a clue about how we feel or what we want, until we start coming to terms with it in ourselves. Again, your cousin will probably expect that you didn't know; that too is normal. And shock is a fairly common first reaction. The closer you've been to someone, the more the shock.

You don't mention whether your cousin is currently living as a female. In the U.S., one year of cross-living is required prior to surgery. If your cousin is now living as a female, then using her female name, and using female pronouns, would be most appropriate (and most appreciated). If your cousin is still living as a male, then ask what name and pronouns he/she would like you to use. (It's OK to ask questions; your cousin probably expects you to ask a LOT of questions!) A time period of adjustment (for you!) to these changes is also normal.

It's OK to be nervous, and it's OK to be getting in touch with him/her because of this change in her life. It's normal for family members to lose touch with each other, and to become closer when some event brings them back together again. The only thing that's unusual in this case is the event itself! If getting together with your cousin brings up other feelings of friendship and past family events or issues, then you certainly won't be coming across as merely "curious."

The fact that you've already exchanged letters is a good start. As you call and as you meet with your cousin, I strongly suggest being open and direct and honest about your feelings, starting with being nervous. Feelings will be communicated whether you talk about them or not; it's best to talk openly, so your cousin will know why you feel a particular way. It's also a good way to address the issues in general; there are certain factual aspects about being a transsexual, but most of the issues that really matter are emotional. If your cousin can write an "upbeat, newsy" letter, then she's probably ready to deal with the emotional side of talking with you.

Finally, thank you for taking the time and trouble to find out what you can before meeting your cousin, and for asking for assistance. I appreciate that you've done that! You're off to a fine start as far as accepting these changes in your cousin's life, and your attitude so far feels good and right to me. Good luck, and enjoy renewing your connections with your cousin.

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